

University of Queensland Graduate School
University of Queensland Faculty of Health Sciences
Three-Minute Thesis Competition – Faculty Final
Friday 12 September 2008
University of Queensland Centre for Clinical Research Auditorium.

HF Akers is from the University of Queensland School of Dentistry

Title: *Water fluoridation in Queensland: new thoughts on an old issue*

Caveat: This address involved a time limit of three minutes and one power point slide.

The social and political history of water fluoridation in Queensland

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75% Fluoridated
5% Fluoridated

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

Centralised authority:
"The more people involved,
the less the chance of adoption."

UQ ethical clearance number - 2002000089

DENTAL HISTORY

An historical perspective on early progress of Queensland water fluoridation 1945-1954: Sheep, climate and sugar

Feature *Candles in the dark:*
fluoride advocates in Queensland 1953-200

A synopsis of the advocacy of artificial water fluoridation within Australia...
by Dr HF Akers

Water Fluoridation in Queensland. Why Not? Timing, Circumstance, and the Nature of The Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Act (1963)
CNSRP 2010 (online)

www.qphd.com.au/publications Historical Journal of Human Sciences 2007 18, 177-19

The 1945-1955 Queensland Artesian Fluoride Experience: A Unique Phenomenon within the Australian Wool Industry

Public opinions of water fluoridation

ARCPH
Australian Research Centre for Public Health, Clinical, and Policy

Journal
of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland
RHSQ Volume 29 No. 6 May 2008

The interface between science and society: water fluoridation as a case study, Bundaberg 1952-57
HF Akers and SAT Porter 217

WATER FLUORIDATION: THE ENGINEERS' CONTRIBUTION
By HF Akers, SAT Porter

BRISBANE INSTITUTE

ARTICLES
Fluoridation and Queensland Difference
Author: [Henry Akers](#)
Date: 01 October 2007

My PhD thesis is a cross-disciplinary and qualitative analysis involving the social and dental sciences.

The problem statement is obvious, Queensland's low fluoridation status.

The reasons why municipalities ignore, defer, reject or implement water fluoridation have long fascinated political and behavioural scientists.

My literature review follows the traditional model of international, Australian and Queensland perspectives.

A hypothesis emerges: “with respect to water fluoridation, the more people involved, the less the chance of adoption.”

Adjusted fluoridation has a genesis anchored in the duality of nature: fluoride has a potential for therapy and toxicity.

To this bipolarity, add community acceptance of the caries epidemic and the political sensitivities of water.

This background explains why adjusted fluoridation is amenable to challenge.

Dental statistics and field studies are the powerhouse of fluoride advocacy.

Herein lay enormous problems for Australian inquiry.

The constitution fragments responsibility for health, research and water treatment.

However, by the 1970s, other states had widely implemented fluoridation.

At this time, political scientists increasingly posed their cultural hypothesis: “Queensland is different”.

Queensland’s topography and demography influenced early fluoride politics.

Distance and decentralisation hindered prospects for epidemiological investigations.

Climate and geology were also relevant.

Queensland’s artesian fluoride experience threatened the pastoral industry.

Twelve deaths following a 1928 vaccination programme in Bundaberg carried a sociological legacy for fluoridation.

Patterns of fluid consumption in cane cutters did not conform to scientific models.

A strong opponent to fluoridation, the Social Credit movement, using the clarion call, “fluoride is a poison”, emerged as another distinctively Queensland factor in Australia’s fluoride politics.

Queensland’s constitutional and sociopolitical backgrounds are also relevant.

The unicameral and cabinet-dominated parliament epitomises centralised authority, which can either implement or hinder public policy.

The 1957 ALP split, electoral redistribution, the “politics of development” and decades of coalition government influenced Queensland’s fluoride politics.

Queensland’s Fluoridation Act institutionalised referendum into decisions and devolved power without resource to local government, which was unprepared for and disinterested in matters relating to oral health.

This background paralysed prospects for adjusted fluoridation in Queensland.

Anna Bligh’s historic announcement in 2007 demonstrates the role of one enduring tenet: centralised authority.

Thank you.